

MEXICO AND TRILATERAL AIR DEFENSE, IS NORAD THE ANSWER?

BY

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USAWC CLASS OF 2009

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 20-02-2009		2. REPORT TYPE Strategy Research Paper		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Mexico and Trilateral Air Defense, is NORAD the Answer?				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Lieutenant Colonel Greg Fernandez				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College 122 Forbes Avenue Carlisle, PA 17013				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) COL Alex Crowther Strategic Studies Institute				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT DISTRIBUTION A: UNLIMITED					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT Seven years following the worst asymmetric air attack in U.S. history, the time is right for a fresh examination of U.S. air defense strategy. The optimum solution to the air defense problem is defeating the threat as far from U.S. borders as possible. As a bi-lateral treaty with Canada, NORAD expands the umbrella of U.S. air defense thousands of miles to the north by utilizing Canadian air defense capabilities. However, the airspace beyond the southern borders of the U.S. remains woefully unprotected. This project examines the feasibility of restructuring NORAD as a trilateral air defense agreement to include Mexico, thereby creating a common continental air defense approach. The following analysis considers relevant history, politics, inter-service cultures and economic linkages along with perceptions of national security threats. The research reveals the limits placed upon the Mexican Air Force by the Mexican Constitution, Estrada Doctrine and its subordination to the Mexican Army. These limitations prohibit their participation in a trilateral air defense agreement without complex constitutional amendments. Recommendations are provided to increase Mexican air defense capabilities without changes to the Mexican constitution.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS National Sovereignty, North American Air Defense, Homeland Defense, Terrorism, NAFTA, National Security					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code)
			UNLIMITED	38	

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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by

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ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Lieutenant Colonel Greg Fernandez
TITLE: Mexico and Trilateral Air Defense, Is NORAD the Answer?
FORMAT: Strategy Research Project
DATE: 20 February 2009 WORD COUNT: 7643 PAGES: 38
KEY TERMS: National Sovereignty, North American Air Defense, Homeland Defense, Terrorism, NAFTA, National Security
CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

Seven years following the worst asymmetric air attack in U.S. history, the time is right for a fresh examination of U.S. air defense strategy. The optimum solution to the air defense problem is defeating the threat as far from U.S. borders as possible. As a bi-lateral treaty with Canada, NORAD expands the umbrella of U.S. air defense thousands of miles to the north by utilizing Canadian air defense capabilities. However, the airspace beyond the southern borders of the U.S. remains woefully unprotected. This project examines the feasibility of restructuring NORAD as a trilateral air defense agreement to include Mexico, thereby creating a common continental air defense approach. The following analysis considers relevant history, politics, inter-service cultures and economic linkages along with perceptions of national security threats. The research reveals the limits placed upon the Mexican Air Force by the Mexican Constitution, Estrada Doctrine and its subordination to the Mexican Army. These limitations prohibit their participation in a trilateral air defense agreement without complex constitutional amendments. Recommendations are provided to increase Mexican air defense capabilities without changes to the Mexican constitution.

MEXICO AND TRILATERAL AIR DEFENSE, IS NORAD THE ANSWER?

The future of this hemisphere depends on the strength of three commitments -- democracy, security, and market-based development. These commitments are inseparable... but it is the only road to stability and prosperity for all the people of this hemisphere.

—President George W. Bush,
January 16, 2002

Effective United States air defense is based upon early warning and a response that is initiated at the greatest distance away from our homeland. The 20th century approach to threats from the air was based primarily on a geographical defense. In other words, we envisioned an electronic “Maginot Line” extending along the geographic boundaries of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, Canada, and Mexico, to deter external threats such as Russia. Myopically, the US strategy failed to consider a threat that ignored physical geographic borders—one that in fact took advantage of such national frontiers, to execute a surprise attack on the U.S. homeland. September 11th 2001 then profoundly changed the North American air defense landscape. For the first time in our history, adversaries originating from the other side of the globe demonstrated the capability to conduct a devastating asymmetric attack on our homeland.

On the seventh anniversary of 9/11, with the costs of two overseas wars rising and a weakened U. S. economy, the time is right for a broad re-examination of homeland air defense in the context of a North American air defense network.¹ The U.S. has tried unilateral domestic air defense operations and realized that they are less effective and more costly than sharing the burden of responsibility with our neighbors. Doctrinally speaking, air defense experts now agree that stopping a threat at the U.S. border is not the optimal solution. Neutralizing or terminating the threat as far from the

homeland as possible is ideal. Therefore a national air defense strategy that focuses on our borders with Canada and Mexico is too restrictive. Contemporary U.S. military leaders are quick to espouse a philosophy of “not fighting yesterday’s wars”. Yet those same leaders are not willing to seriously examine the geographical limitation of our current strategy, one which has remained the same since 2001. Examining US air defense in a broader context should begin with consideration of air defense from a holistic North American perspective. This extended horizon of U.S. air defense standoff capability provides almost 2000 miles of protection at a minimal cost.

Besides sharing a common language and culture, Canada and the US have a long-standing history of security cooperation. For over 60 years, the United States and Canada have shared air defense responsibilities through the North American Aerospace Defense Region (NORAD). Although Mexico also shares a common border with the US, it has not enjoyed a close military-to-military relationship or air defense agreement, as Canada has. However, economic pressures are influencing all three nations views of cooperative defense. Indeed the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) changed the overall relationships among the three. Linked geographically and historically, the countries’ economies are now so intertwined that there appears to be a single North American economy, not three separate economies. This new economic relationship enhances prospects of mutual security. Strikes on one country will have far-reaching economic impacts on the others, as demonstrated by 9/11. Additionally, the number of potential airborne terrorist targets increases by a factor of three. All three economies, infrastructure and people become potential targets. In most first-world countries, the number of critical infrastructure targets can number from the thousands to

tens of thousands. Accordingly, terrorists have tripled their odds of success; they also have literally thousands of potential hard and soft targets. Yet the backdoor from Mexico remains open, with no integrated lethal air-to-air capability and limited surface-to-air defense capabilities south of the US/Mexico border with which to engage these threats.

The concept of cooperative security is not new to the western Hemisphere. Attempts to address mutual economic and security anxiety date back to the first Inter-American Congress in 1889, held in Washington, D.C.² Then, as now, geographic proximity and mutual economic and historical linkages make a cooperative security agreement, in the form of a North American air defense strategy, worthy of consideration. This SRP examines the feasibility of restructuring NORAD as a trilateral air defense agreement to include Mexico, thereby creating a common continental air defense approach. The following analysis considers relevant history, politics, inter-service cultures and economic linkages along with perceptions of national security threats.

The US and Canada

Though not doctrinally defined, the concepts of trilateral air defense and trilateral security are one in the same. Trilateral security is a collaborative effort among three nations to address and overcome perceived threats to their collective security. The US, Canada, and Mexico constitute a specific geostrategic sub-unit that has interlocking military, economic, environmental, and demographic security interests. Economic interests are of great importance to all three states. Therefore, an attack of any type on one country is an attack on all.

History has shown that relations between the United States and their geographical neighbors have been both a blessing and a curse. There are stark differences in US-Canadian history and US-Mexican history. Even though the United States invaded Canada several times in the early days of the Republic, since the 1860s the US and Canada have leveraged their commonalities to sustain a tightly knit relationship at all levels of government and military affairs. Their military relationship can be characterized as one of continually deepening engagement beginning in World War II. In August 1940 in Ogdensburg, NY, President Roosevelt invited Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King to form a Permanent Joint Board on Defense(PJBD). The ensuing Ogdensburg Agreement committed America to defending its northern neighbor; more importantly, it served as the first major strategic military and economic alliance between the two nations to last beyond WWII.³ Also in 1940, the US established its first bi-national defense board with Canada for addressing matters of continental defense and security. The PJBD and a new and lasting strategic collaborative partnership was born. Beginning with the Ogdensburg Agreement, Canada has actively sought to strengthen their operational links with the US while “tending to embrace joint continental defense efforts”.⁴

The post-WWII era marked the beginning of the Cold War and new bilateral military commitments between the countries. Canada and the United States ushered in this new era with the signing of the NORAD agreement on May 12, 1958. The threat of long-range Soviet strategic bombers armed with air-launched nuclear missiles motivated the US and Canada to form this convenient air defense agreement. NORAD married US and Canadian capabilities to counter an air-launched Soviet nuclear attack.

For over 50 years, NORAD has effectively protected the United States and Canada from any symmetric nation-state attack. No nation-state has threatened either country's sovereignty. However, this mutually beneficial agreement morphed when the World Trade Towers were attacked and destroyed. Post 9/11, the US and Canada have furthered their air defense strategy by altering the traditional mission sets. Today NORAD provides air defense against asymmetric and symmetric threats, but now NORAD includes a maritime warning capability as well. Changes to the 1958 NORAD mission set are summed up in its most recent mission statement:

In close collaboration with homeland defense, security, and law enforcement partners, prevent air attacks against North America, safeguard the sovereign airspaces of the United States and Canada by responding to unknown, unwanted, and unauthorized air activity approaching and operating within these airspaces, and provide aerospace and maritime warning for North America.⁵

The level of military interconnectedness between the two countries is evident in 80+ treaty-level defense agreements, more than 250 memoranda of understanding, approximately 145 bilateral forums in which defense matters are discussed - along with countless smaller military contacts not reported between the US and Canada.⁶ From an air defense and military point of view, the relationship between the US and Canada is as close as it gets.

The Estrada Doctrine and Non-Intervention

Mexico's foreign relations have been shaped by a historically rooted national doctrine developed in the aftermath of the 1910-1920 Mexican Revolution that espouses a nationalistic and defensive approach to foreign affairs and defense policies.⁷ Laissez faire and respect for sovereignty are the doctrine's core principles.⁸

México's inclination toward isolationism, status quo security policy, and non-intervention originated with the Estrada Doctrine.

Genaro Estrada (1887 – 1937) formulated his doctrine while serving as the Mexican foreign minister during the Mexican Revolution. The Estrada doctrine does not allow foreign countries to intervene in Mexico's internal affairs; at the same time, Mexico does not interfere in other countries' affairs.⁹ The doctrine restricts the Mexican Government and military's active participation in security cooperation agreements when the perception of Mexican participation exceeds what is necessary for defense of its borders. For example, Mexico's non-support of US intervention in Iraq, through a sampling of ten Mexican newspapers (two independent, four left wing, two centrist, two pro-business), appeared to be grounded in the Estrada Doctrine and the defensive Mexican mindset which would not allow for support of operations that went beyond what was necessary for the defense of Mexico's borders.¹⁰

The Mexican Constitution further restrains the armed forces' roles and responsibilities. According to the Mexican Constitution as amended in 1966, the role of the armed forces is to defend "the sovereignty and independence of the nation, maintaining the Constitution and its laws, and preserving internal order...to secure and defend the independence, the territory, the honor, the rights and interests of the homeland, as well as domestic tranquility and order."¹¹ Hence, Mexico's approach to national security focuses on domestic affairs and non-intervention in other nations' affairs because of the constraints imposed by the Mexican Constitution and the Estrada Doctrine. The armed forces respond domestically to a broad array of transnational

threats and public policy issues that range from narco-trafficking and terrorism to organized crime, poverty and natural disasters.¹²

The Mexican government persistently uses this isolationist tradition to reject closer military cooperation between the U.S. and México. Any time the Mexican government perceives the Secretaría de La Defensa Nacional or Mexican Army (SEDENA)/ Fuerza Aérea Mexicanos or Mexican Air Force (FAM) and the United States Air Force (USAF) relationship as getting “too close,” it effectively blocks or resists military cooperation, citing the Estrada Doctrine and the Mexican Constitution. Mexico also continues to employ a strategy of sovereignty (based upon the Constitution and the Estrada Doctrine) and appeals to anti-US sentiments to generate domestic support for the current political party. The deeply ingrained history of foreign intervention in Mexico neatly dovetails with the argument for sovereignty thereby making military cooperation “taboo” for public debate.¹³ So a stained history, an internally focused national defense policy, and an exclusionary defense doctrine seriously precludes closer U.S. – Mexican cooperation. But these obstacles are not insurmountable.

The US and Mexico

Over the past decade, Washington DC and Mexico City’s engagement strategies of developing a pragmatic security arrangement has been an uphill battle waged mostly against historic suspicions.¹⁴ While U.S. Army and SEDENA engagements have progressed, the U.S. Air Force engagement with the FAM have stagnated. USAF/FAM engagement over the past several years has been characterized by few military-to-military contacts consisting mainly of several FAM visits to the USNORTHCOM’s Air Force component--Air Forces Northern (AFNORTH, located at Tyndall Air Force Base,

Florida)--and lower level reciprocal visits. History and inter-service rivalries help explain the situation. For Mexico, historic relations have few peaks and many troughs. Mexico perceives that they have borne the brunt of US expansionism, which irritates the Mexican population even today. A Library of Congress Country Study of Mexico noted,

Bilateral relations with the United States have been strongly affected by the bitter legacy left by Mexico's loss of more than one-half of its territory in 1848 and subsequent incidents of United States infringement of its sovereignty. General Winfield Scott's 1847 siege of the capital, the United States marines' 1914 occupation of Veracruz, and General Pershing's 1916 punitive expedition in northern Mexico against Pancho Villa were traumatic episodes in Mexican history. Even in the post-World War II era, most Mexicans viewed United States domination, not Soviet-Cuban designs in the Western Hemisphere or revolutionary regimes in Central America, as the major foreign threat to national sovereignty. Although fears of armed intervention by the United States have receded, concerns over United States economic and political penetration persist.¹⁵

Museums in Mexico City sensationalize perceptions of US aggression. At the entrance to Mexico City's Chapultepec Park is a daunting monument called *Niños Heroes* or Child Heroes. *Niños Heroes* statues are dedicated to the six military cadets who gave their lives rather than surrender to Scott's 1847 invading force in at Chapultepec Castle, or *El Castillo*. Defying a superior force, the heroic six embraced death by leaping from a cliff while wrapped in a Mexican flag. To the general Mexican public, the *Niños Heroes* serve as a continual reminder of historic US transgressions and seizures of what was originally Mexican territory.¹⁶ To this day, cadets at the Mexican Military Academy recite the names of the *Niños Heroes* daily.

On the other hand, Americans tend to have a short historical memory. For U.S. citizens, the US expedition is ancient history. Yet, to the average Mexican, the Mexican-American war and *Niños Heroes* remains very vivid: It is recent history.

U.S. investments in Mexico during the last decades of the 19th century contribute to the stereotype of the “rich gringos”; resentment of Yankee economic exploitation of southern underdogs remain alive and well in Mexico. In fact, perpetuating this stereotype is advantageous to the Mexican government: It helps them maintain domestic order by positing a false, yet believable, relationship between Mexico’s internal problems and U.S. power and greed. Mexican politicians continue to exploit this myth because the general Mexican population is not ready to forget the past 200 years or let their guard down. They fear that any cooperation with the U.S. will once again expose them to U.S. exploitation.

The armed forces of Mexico consist of two distinct components: The Secretariat of National Defense which oversees both SEDENA and the FAM, and the Secretariat of the Navy (SEMAR). The command and control of the FAM is similar to that of the U.S. Army Air Corps in 1941 when it was subordinate to the Army before becoming a separate service in 1947. The FAM is subordinate to and part of the Mexican Army. Because they are trapped in the SEDENA apparatus, prospects for promotion of any of the FAM leaders to the minister level of leadership are nil.¹⁷ In fact, service jealousy and inter-service rivalry is so great that SEDENA will not allow any FAM initiative to proceed without Army approval.¹⁸ Because of this superior-subordinate relationship, when SEDENA does not benefit from a U.S. / FAM initiative, the initiative will surely stop at the SEDENA S-2, so it never proceeds to the ministerial level of command.

In 1941 the U.S. had a command arrangement between the Department of War and the Department of the Army, which is analogous to the current command and control arrangement in Mexico between the Army and Navy. An active duty officer—a

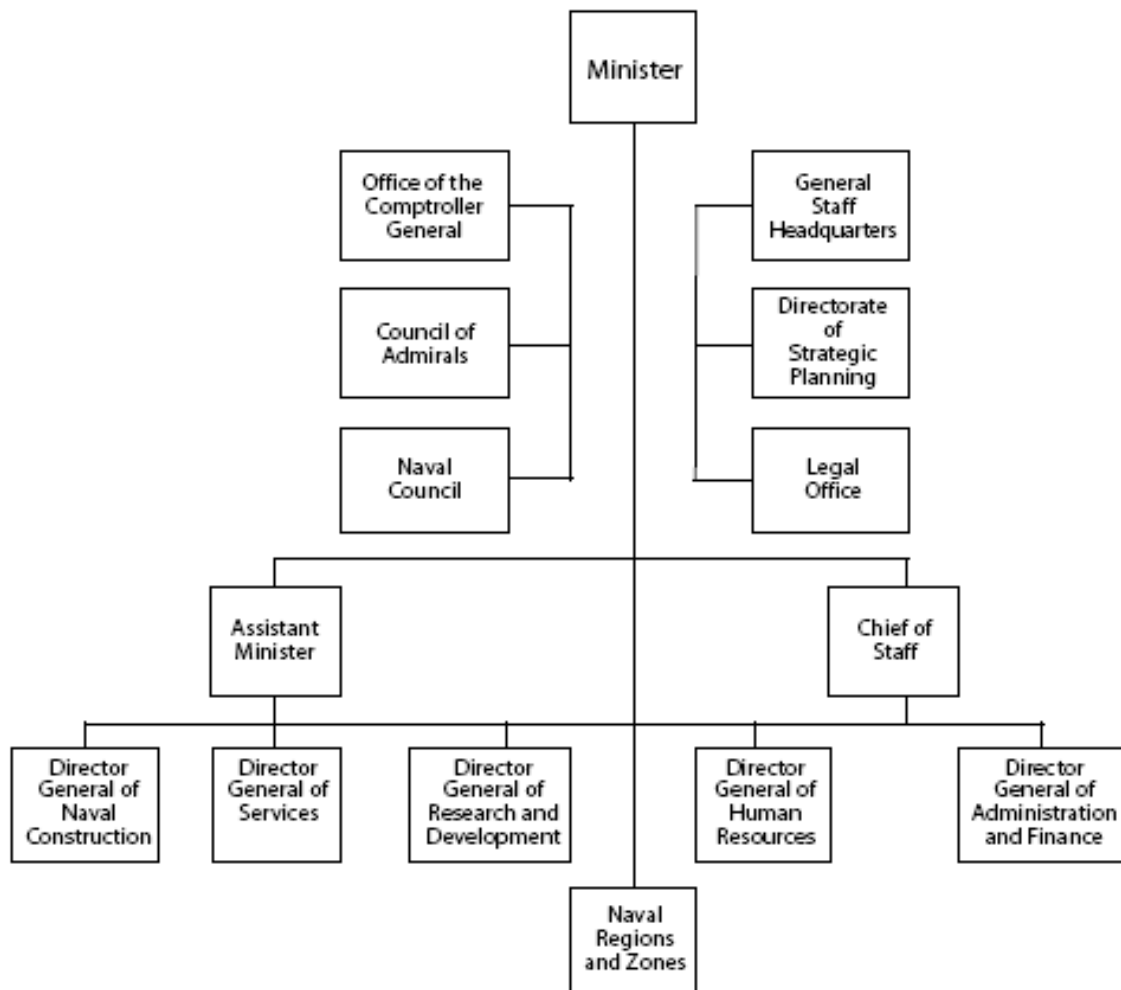


Figure 2. SEMAR Chain of Command

The roles and responsibilities of the services are stipulated in the Mexican Constitution. Chapter One, Article One of the “*Ley Orgánica del Ejército y Fuerza Aérea Mexicanos*” or the Constitutional Law of the Mexican Army and Air Force assigns five missions to SEDENA/FAM:

1. Defense of the Integrity, Independence, and Sovereignty of the Nation;
2. Internal Security;
3. Civic action and Social Projects that Assist in the Development of the Nation;

4. Conducting civic actions and social causes that tend to the country's progress;
5. In the event of a disaster to help maintain order, help the people and their property and reconstruction of the affected areas.²²

Article Three of the Constitutional Law of the Mexican Army and Air Force further refines and constrains the Mexican Army/Air Force's roles and missions: "The Mexican Army and Air Force should be organized, trained and equipped under the requirements to accomplish their missions."²³ Simply put, the Constitution mandates their inward focus, so activities not conforming to this requirement are deemed unconstitutional. Articles One and Three explain why Air Force engagement is an uphill battle and why they pose obstacles for FAM – USAF cooperative activities. Traditional air engagement strategies that are executed in exercises are usually offensive in nature and conducted outside Mexico. This creates a twofold problem for the USAF: First, participation in exercises where offensive strikes are involved is difficult to justify to services whose constitutional mandate is internally focused and to a country that does not recognize any external threats. Second, according to Article 76 Section Three of the Political Constitution of the Mexican United States:

The Senate shall have power: To authorize the president's orders under which troops are sent beyond the national borders, foreign troops are allowed to travel across the country...

Therefore, the Mexican Senate must approve travel of the military beyond the nation's borders. Though rare, this can and has taken place: As recently as 2005, SEDENA deployed north of Mexican border during Hurricane Katrina relief efforts. This was the first time since 1846 that Mexican troops had operated on American soil. These constitutional limitations are extremely important for planning exercises with the FAM.

In fairness to SEDENA, the Constitution actually enforces subordination of the FAM to SEDENA. SEDENA's mission focuses on domestic order and support to civil authorities. In order to meet the mission requirements in a country with limited ground lines of communication, SEDENA wants air support to be available at the ground commander's beck and call. FAM independence would require negotiation for air support; more importantly, as with the USAF, money would move from SEDENA's budget to buy costly modern aircraft. This subordination will continue because it is unrealistic to believe SEDENA would support an independent FAM, given these two major issues.

Unlike SEDENA and the FAM, many view SEMAR's relationship with the U.S. Navy as Mexico's closest military-to-military relationship with U.S. services. SEMAR frequently conducts training and exercises with U.S. Naval forces, leaving their Army and Air Force counterparts wondering where their engagement strategies are falling short. The answer lies in the Mexican Constitution. SEMAR is not constrained to internally focused missions like SEDENA and FAM. The "*Ley Orgánica de la Armada de México*" or the constitutional law of the Mexican Navy, specifies the Navy's mission:

Chapter One - Article One: The Mexican Navy is a national military institution of a permanent nature, whose mission is to employ the power Shipbuilding of the Federation for external defense and assist in the internal security of the country.²⁴

Chapter One – Article Three: The Mexican Navy will implement its responsibilities by themselves or jointly with the Army and Air Force or with units of the Federal Executive, when he ordered the Supreme Command or when circumstances require.²⁵

Therefore, constitutionally, SEMAR has two main missions—the use of naval power to ensure external defense and to assist in internal security.²⁶ Whereas SEDENA

has constitutionally directed internally focused duties, SEMAR can and does use the Constitution to their advantage for conducting external engagements. SEDENA or the FAM will not enjoy this luxury without amendments to the Constitution.

The Common Threat

Politics and history are barriers to successful implementation of a trilateral air defense strategy. In the past during times of great international crisis, these barriers have been overcome when Mexico was forced to acknowledge a mutual threat and cooperate with US military forces. During WWII, the *Escuadron Aereo de Pelea 201* (201st Mexican Fighter Squadron) of the Mexican Expeditionary Air Force (*Fuerza Aerea Expedicionaria Mexicana*) fought alongside U.S. forces. It is the only Mexican military unit that ever fought outside the Mexican Republic.²⁷ This Squadron was assigned to the 58th Fighter Group that operated out of Porac airstrip at Clark Field in the Philippines.²⁸ This example confirms that a common threat can overcome national barriers and trigger unprecedented cooperation.

Is there a common threat that could now unite the three? A trilateral air defense strategy will take place only with buy-in from all three countries. Further, such a strategy cannot be successfully implemented if any of the parties do not perceive a common threat. If the countries perceive mutually exclusive national threats, lacking some sort of mutual association no country will feel compelled to cooperate and support the others. Without a common threat, there can be no unity of effort. At the first sign of difficulty, the “it’s their problem” mentality will extinguish the cooperative spirit. It simply is not in a country’s best interest to pursue a strategy with no payback.

U.S. national security focuses mostly on the threat of terrorism. Within the past year, President Bush issued an updated *National Strategy for Homeland Security* designed to unify US homeland security efforts. This strategy builds upon the 2002 *National Strategy for Homeland Security*, the 2006 *National Security Strategy*, and the 2006 *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*. These strategies strengthen the US approach to homeland security by specifying how the US can ensure long-term success by strengthening the homeland security foundation because of increased understanding of the terrorist threat confronting the US.²⁹ Four specific goals to accomplish US homeland security efforts are: *Prevent and disrupt terrorist attacks; protect the American people, our critical infrastructure, and key resources, respond to and recover from incidents that do occur; continue to strengthen the foundation to ensure our long-term success.*³⁰ Furthermore, Homeland Security is defined as “a concerted national effort to prevent *terrorist attacks* within the United States.”³¹ The terrorism issue echoes throughout the strategy. Through close interpretation of this document and the National Security Strategy of 2006, it is obvious that fighting and winning against terrorism is a pillar of the US National Security Strategy. Terrorism is the enemy America now faces in its Global War on Terror (GWOT).

Canada and the United States share a common language and have very similar cultures. Visitors to Chicago or Toronto have difficulty identifying cultural differences due to inherent cultural similarities. Furthermore, the US and Canada share 2,000 miles of border; they are joined in a large number of bi-lateral, formal and informal agreements. Economically, Canada is the primary trading partner with the United States. Since the implementation of NAFTA, two-way agricultural trade between the

United States and Canada increased over 250 percent, reaching \$28.1 billion in 2008.³² Canada is now the No. 1 market for U.S. agricultural exports, which climbed from \$5.3 billion in 1993 to \$16.2 billion in 2008.³³ The benefits accruing from NAFTA go beyond an increase in dollars for Canada. The combination of NAFTA, and Canada's proximity to the US have contributed to effectively interweaving the Canadian economy with Mexico. Furthermore, the economic gains from NAFTA have exposed the Canadians to the true economic benefits of trilateral trade, but at the same time exposed their economy as a critical vulnerability.

The Canadian National Security Strategy reveals a convergence of US/Canadian views on national security threats. According to the Canadian National Security Strategy, "Securing an Open Society: Canada's National Security Policy," the major Canadian national security interests are: *Protecting Canada and the safety and security of Canadians at home and abroad, ensuring Canada is not a base for threats to our allies, and contributing to international security.*³⁴ The document links Canadian national security interests to their national security threats--*Terrorism and proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)*. Though Canada's National Security objectives are slightly different from the U.S. objectives, like the U.S., fighting and defeating terrorism is a central pillar in Canadian national security.

There seems to be consensus amongst the Canadian national strategists that fighting terrorism is of national importance. However, the Canadians see the loss of sovereignty as the greatest obstacle to increased continental security cooperation. So they walk a tightrope in their relationship with the US; They welcome military cooperation, yet need to maintain the perception of defending their national

sovereignty.³⁵ Canada engages the US military not only because they view the strategic environment in a similar manner but also because they view their cooperation as a strategy in and of itself for maintaining sovereignty. As the weaker of the powers, they believe that cooperation allows them to exert indirect influence and enable them to check US unilateralism when it is perceived as infringing upon Canada's sovereignty. Canadian politicians have masterfully used the fear of sovereign infringement to their advantage. Beyond political mudslinging, both governments have a common understanding of why defeating terrorism is an integral part of their national security. It is because of this mutual understanding and their long history of peaceful military engagements that makes bilateral agreements such as NORAD possible. For Canada and the U.S., the agreement provides more capability by providing air defense against mutually agreed upon threats, at the same time, sharing the costs.

From a narrow air defense point of view, terrorism in and of itself is not the proper national security strategic objective. With proper queuing, NORAD fighters can eliminate any airborne threat. Therefore, the actual national strategic threat is the loss of Canadian or U.S. sovereignty due to asymmetric air attacks. NORAD has effectively maintained U.S./Canadian sovereignty against state actors for over 60 years. But 9/11's demonstrated violation of a nation's sovereignty caused citizens to question their government's ability to provide protection. Further, these attacks have imposed lasting, negative economic effects upon the world's economic powerhouse. But their violation of sovereignty constitutes the real threat.

Countering terrorism as a central threat to U.S. national security currently stops at the Mexican border. Arguably, the differing U.S. and Mexican views are not due to

unrelated national security threats but more a function of the refusal to intellectually address the threat for what it really is – a challenge to national sovereignty. Unlike the US and Canada, Mexico does not have an official National Security Strategy. In fact, General Gerardo Clemente Ridardo Vega, the Mexican Secretary of National Defense, is one of the only credible authors to write several books and articles on a Mexican National Security Strategy. Vega's view of the threat focuses the internal political and economic situation. According to the "*El Ejército y Fuerza Aérea Mexicanos*" (The Mexican Army and Air Force) and his first book on National Security, "*Seguridad Nacional: Concepto, Organización, Método*" (National Security: Concept, Organization, Method), the Mexican Secretary of Defense defines the threats to Mexico's National Security as: *The war on drugs and organized crime, arms trafficking, international terrorists, and money laundering.*³⁶ Of particular importance are the priorities. Terrorism takes a back seat to the war on drugs and organized crime. This makes sense in light of a Mexican Constitution that requires an inward looking doctrine and the domestic belief that Mexico has no neighboring external threats. Therefore, from the Mexican point of view as it faces instability due to the growing power of drug cartels, logically it would make no sense for terrorism to be a Mexican national security priority.

Canada and the US see terrorism and the concomitant violation of their national sovereignty as a national security threat, whereas Mexico views drug trafficking as their primary national security threat. Yet, fighting terrorism and fighting drug trafficking appear to be one in the same. By fighting one, a country fights the other and vice versa. Transnational drug trade, arms smuggling, and terrorism are all examples of transnational security threats. It is well documented that money from transnational crime

is used to support of terrorist organizations, whose members use the routes established by traffickers.³⁷ Chief of Intelligence analysis for the Department of Homeland Security and former CIA analyst Charles Allen have claimed that extremist groups could use well-established routes and drug profits to bring people or weapons of mass destruction to the US.³⁸ Additionally Allen observed that, "The presence of these people in the region leaves open the possibility that they will attempt to attack the US."³⁹ This belief is shared by other departments of the government. A DEA representative recently declared that, ""What we know for sure is that persons associated with terrorist groups have discovered what cartels have known all along — the [southern] border is the backdoor into the U.S."⁴⁰ It was publically disclosed that "Islamic extremists" embedded in the US—posing as Hispanic nationals—are partnering with violent Mexican gangs to finance terror networks in the Middle East.⁴¹ The evidence is overwhelming; Drugs and terror are connected. The overwhelming evidence points to the war on drugs and the war on terrorism as having a close linkage so that each war is actually dependent upon the other. Each enemy has different leadership and different ends, yet they are using the same ways and means (crime and violence) in order to achieve that desired end state. The war on drugs is also the war on terror.

Arguably, drugs and the corrupt people who transport them by infiltrating a country violate a nation's sovereignty. Drug-related violence destabilizes the government's power base and degrades citizens' confidence in their government's ability to maintain order. For Mexico, drug trafficking has been their highest priority for decades. Drugs flow through Mexico to the US. Drug cartels have used the profits from drug trafficking to destabilize the legitimate government and exert control of remote,

largely ungoverned areas. The same routes used for the transportation of drugs can be easily used for transporting terrorists and/or terrorist material. The fact that the drug cartels use their money and power to intimidate the populace and destabilize the government gives the war on drugs another name: narco-terrorism.⁴² Therefore, though Mexico identifies their national security threat as drug trafficking, the reality is it is another form of terrorism and constitutes a violation of their national sovereignty. Will the US, Canada, and Mexico stop fighting a war of words and focus on fighting the true enemy of their democracies, regardless of semantics?

General Vega's national security threats and strategy focus on Mexico. But what are Mexico's security concerns with the US? Aside from drugs, Mexico's greatest fear is that it will be struck by terrorists in an indirect attack on the US. As a second order effect, such an attack would cause the U.S. to close its borders to all Mexican goods. This would be particularly damaging to Mexico if it appeared that the terrorists used Mexico as a staging base to launch an air attack on the United States.⁴³ Multiple effects would result from an air attack: The U.S. would seal its borders and Mexico's economy would be devastated, with the greatest economic impacts shouldered by the Mexican public. This could further destabilize the government, jeopardizing its legitimacy and precipitating eventual collapse or overthrow. Although this is the worst case scenario, the economic realities of the US/Mexican relationship are as intertwined as those of the US/Canadian relationship. Such an attack could result in the realization of the worst case scenario. Mexican – U.S. trade has grown over the last 14 years since NAFTA was implemented. Mexico is now the number two trading partner with the U.S. making Canada and Mexico the top two U.S. trading partners. Profits from NAFTA have linked

the US, Mexican, and Canadian economies. Economically, the Mexican government should consider their existence as dependent on the economic foundation which is supported by the U.S. and Canada. Therefore, their cooperation to protect their northern border or a strategically important resource area, such as the Cantrell Oil Fields in the Bay of Campeche, from an air attack is in their best interest.

The United States and Mexico have other tangible linkages that would favor a trilateral security agreement. Studies over the past two decades have shown a convergence of personal, family, and public values among all three countries. Of the 37.4 million Hispanics in the United States, 64% or 27 million are of Mexican extraction.⁴⁴ So the two countries are linked in terms of human capital. Survey data from all three countries found that an overwhelming majority supported more integrated North American policies on the environment, transportation, and defense. Likewise, 75% of US citizens and Canadians and two-thirds of the Mexicans support the development of a North American security perimeter.⁴⁵ This data indicates the general public of all three countries would likely support the concept of a trilateral agreement such as true North American air defense network in the form of an expanded NORAD.

NAFTA has already solidified economic cooperation among these North American neighbors. NAFTA is the world's largest free trade area that generates about one-third of the world's total GDP, accounting for about 19% of global exports and 25% of global imports.⁴⁶ Exports to the US from Mexico represent over 25% of Mexican GDP. In terms of real GDP, the Mexican economy grew 4.4% in 2006 and 3.3% in 2007.⁴⁷ In 2007, Mexico was the world's eighth largest crude exporter and the third

largest supplier of oil to the US; these revenues provide more than one-third of all Mexican revenues.⁴⁸

How do terrorists view the U.S./Canadian/Mexican relationship? Through a terrorist's lens, the relationships with Canada and Mexico appear to be a critical vulnerability ripe for exploitation. A well-planned air attack on critical North American resources or transportation nodes would cause damage to all three economies. For example, air defense of Mexico's natural resources are of concern to the Mexican Navy, particularly the Cantrell oil fields. This oil field is both a huge source of revenue to the Mexican government and a oil source to the U.S. Exporting oil to the United States is Mexico's greatest source of revenue. In 2007, the Mexican Navy (SEMAR) requested an air defense assessment from Air Forces Northern (AFNORTH), the air component to USNORTHCOM, to plan for defense of this critical infrastructure node. SEMAR acknowledged that a well-placed air attack on the oil field would have catastrophic domestic and international implications. Expanding NORAD was not a recommendation. Because of constitutional/financial constraints and the Estrada Doctrine, the study recommended that Mexico leverage organic civil and military capabilities to provide the necessary air defense coverage of critical nodes. In other words, the AFNORTH assessment simply put a Mexican face on solving the Mexican problem. However, the report did recommend utilizing existing infrastructure while working toward full radar and data integration with the US as future supporting equipment is procured. This cost-effective alternative would provide an air defense capability while easing Mexican concerns about its sovereignty.

Trilateral Air Defense Network

Ideally, full cross border radar data integration, robust cross-border intelligence sharing, fully interoperable air and ground systems, lethal take-down capability, and transparent cross-border rules of engagement (ROE) would comprise the bedrock of a trilateral air defense operation. However, to use the U.S.-Canada NORAD agreement as a model for Mexico, the Mexican Constitution would have to be amended. The domestic focus of SEDENA/FAM should be expanded to grant the Mexican Army/ Air Force flexibility to conduct some operations outside Mexican borders. Changing the Mexican military structure to one controlled by a civilian secretary and separate-but-equal ministries of the Air Force, Army, and Navy headed by equal civilian ministers is an alternative. But this also would require amending the Constitution. The Secretary of Defense would remain a military officer. The Secretariat would alternate between the three services every three years, or half of a Mexican presidential term. A separate Air Force ministry would end Air Force subordination to the Army, but would involve considerable constitutional amendments to redefine FAM missions and exempt the FAM from the original constraints of the Mexican Constitution. But the ensuing political and financial costs to the Mexican government would probably be too costly for them to consider. So expanding NORAD does not seem like a viable way to arrive at an effective trilateral security agreement.

However, a realistic constitutional or service change is feasible, but would be very difficult. Such change would encounter political, inter-service, doctrinal, technological, and financial barriers.

Politics would be the first and most difficult barrier to overcome. The United States and Canada have worked through their differences to enter into deeply

cooperative bilateral military agreements. Yet the hurdles are even higher for constructing trilateral military agreement with Mexico. From a political standpoint, the Mexican government has more to gain by keeping these barriers in place than by removing them. Max Manwaring's *The Gray Area Phenomenon* describes how countries like Mexico avoid dealing with such issues: "The primary threat is the nation-state's unwillingness or inability to deal with the root causes of instability; a related threat is the nation-states' unwillingness or inability to deal with...conflicts that are the consequences of political, economic and social instability."⁴⁹ The Mexican government probably would not survive an initiative to gain membership in NORAD. The combined effects of the Mexican Constitution, the Estrada Doctrine, Mexico's pacifist tendencies, and the historically tainted US/Mexican relationship would mean political suicide for any politician who supports such a strategy. It would be difficult to find any military or political leader willing to risk their careers for such a cause. It is easier to ignore the evidence, accept the risk and deal with the political fallout later if something untoward happens. President Calderon recognized this when he signed the 2005 Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) with the US and Canada. This trilateral agreement was designed to increase security and to enhance prosperity among the three countries through greater cooperation. The overarching objectives sum up this comprehensive agreement:

- Coordinate our security efforts to better protect U.S. citizens from terrorist threats and transnational crime and promote the safe and efficient movement of legitimate people and goods;
- Expand economic opportunity for all our people by making our businesses more competitive in the global marketplace, cutting red tape, and providing consumers with safe, less expensive, and innovative products; and

- Enhance our common efforts to combat infectious diseases, develop responses to man-made or natural disasters to enhance our citizens' quality of life, protect our people and our environment, and improve consumer safety.⁵⁰

More specifically, this agreement sought to secure North America and ensure the movement of people and cargo across the shared borders.⁵¹ Despite support from the highest national leaders, the SPP has yet to produce measurable results. President Bush, President Calderon, and Prime Minister Harper acknowledge the need for change and trilateral cooperation in their April 22, 2008 joint statement: "We will continue working to fight transnational threats that pose challenges to our countries and the well-being of our people...these threats make it imperative that our domestic efforts be complemented and strengthened by our cooperation together, and in international fora."⁵² Even though the three leaders agree on the desirability of trilateral cooperation, there appears to be no political support for amending the Mexican Constitution in order to pave the way for the FAMs participation in NORAD.

Because SEDENA is focused totally inward on their mission, sharing a command such as NORAD with the US and Canada would be unthinkable, because this security strategy is primarily focused outside Mexico. As such, this would not be seen as contributing to preserving internal stability, the primary SEDENA mandate.⁵³ SEDENA is not committed to a continental security arrangement of any sort. Additionally, ever conscious of their public image, the proud SEDENA hierarchy may not allow the FAM to engage in trilateral cooperation because of Mexico's underdeveloped command and control systems and outdated technology.⁵⁴ Public acknowledgement of these shortfalls would be viewed as a black mark to SEDENA's pride. But C2 and interoperability are serious and expensive issues. The US and Canada have worked over 60 years to build

seamless interoperability while maintaining state of the art technology, especially modern generational fighters. Yet, Mexico is decades behind this technology. Mexico's most capable aircraft is the F-5, which currently has no radar, data link or missile capability - all of which are essential to successful lethal air defense using fighter aircraft. Communication between air-to-air and air-to-ground systems would require significant upgrades. México is not in the position to fund such expensive initiatives. So who would pay the bill? Most likely the US. Without substantial monetary support for modernizing Mexican aircraft, systems, and constructing a robust C2 capability, expanding NORAD is not technologically feasible. The interoperability issues would be too great. Absent vital national interests, the huge sums of money required to fund Mexican participation in NORAD would not be in the best interests of the US taxpayer.

To circumvent financial and sovereignty concerns, synchronizing the NORAD system and the USNORTHCOM security cooperation functions may be the answer.⁵⁵ Sharing the same headquarters in Colorado Springs, NORAD and USNORTHCOM have integrated staff planning functions. Mexican and Canadian security cooperation is a USNORTHCOM planning function (J5 Theater Security Cooperation). From an air defense perspective, USNORTHCOM has laid the groundwork for a capable North American Air Defense network. Using the USNORTHCOM SEMAR liaison officer as template, USNORTHCOM should support the assignment of a FAM liaison officer to AFNORTH in accordance with a reciprocal agreement at Sistema Integrado de Vigilancia Aérea (the Mexican Air Operations Center [SIVA]) in Mexico City for the initial strengthening of USAF/FAM relations. Additionally, USNORTHCOM J5, NORAD, FAM, and AFNORTH should collectively plan radar and intelligence-sharing focused on the

southern U.S. border and the interior of Mexico. This planning effort should meld current Mexican radar feeds into the NORAD common operating picture while sharing the information with Mexico through the Mexican Air Operations Center (SIVA) in Mexico City. Merging the system with any SEDENA surface-to-air missile system will provide the basic foundation of Mexico's air defense system. In the long term, in coordination with USNORTHCOM, NORAD and AFNORTH, Mexico should develop a plan to base two squadrons of F-16 fighter aircraft (or equivalent multi-role aircraft) at their northern and southern borders. These planes should emphasize the advantage of a multi-role aircraft. Along with air sovereignty they can be used as an additional airborne sensors during natural disasters. Civil support operations gain an additional airborne surveillance capability. Also, Mexico's sovereignty is enhanced by providing a credible deterrent against airborne drug traffickers. Likewise, the U.S. gains fighters that have the capability to operate within the NORAD system. Mexico thus fights the war on drugs and provides an additional civil support capability, while the U.S. gains a more secure southern border.

Recommendations

Because of constitutional restraints, history, and FAM subordination to SEDENA, USNORTHCOM should support a Mexican liaison position at AFNORTH and pursue a reciprocal position with SIVA. Additionally, AFNORTH, in coordination with USNORTHCOM, should pursue full cross-border radar, data and intelligence integration with Mexico. The best chance for success resides in Defense Support to Civil Authorities (DSCA) exercises in which Mexicans are fully integrated partners, so they must be included in the initial planning process. USNORTHCOM should support the

assignment of a FAM liaison officer to AFNORTH (USNORTHCOM Air Component) along with a reciprocal agreement at SIVA in Mexico City. Additionally, USNORTHCOM J5, NORAD, FAM and AFNORTH should collectively plan radar and intelligence-sharing that focuses on the southern U.S. border and the interior of Mexico. The planning effort should meld current Mexican radar feeds into the NORAD common operating picture, while sharing the information with Mexico through SIVA in Mexico City. SEDENA surface-to-air missile facilities should be merged with a long-term strategic goal of two squadrons of fourth or fifth generation fighter aircraft stationed at Mexico's northern and southern borders. Thus early warning capabilities would be matched by quick response capabilities.

Conclusion

Countries engage in collective strategies when it is in their interests to do so. Without a vested interest there is no motivation to commit the "means" in pursuit of strategic "ends". The U.S., Mexico and Canada all have vested interests in committing collective means. Threats to their national sovereignty are real. Though all three view threats to their national security different, the common threat is the ability of a non-state actor to violate any nation's sovereignty and thereby to weaken the people's faith in their government and the economy. Classifying and categorizing threats merely forestalls the recognition of what is truly at stake. Leaders of all three countries can further their security goals trilaterally if and when they perceive security threats as truly a violation of their national sovereignty.

A trilateral air defense network with Mexico is currently not feasible due to constitutional, political, interoperability, and parochial constraints. However, a closer

NORAD and USNORTHCOM cooperative security relationship and exchange of engagement opportunities could include the FAM and provide a more effective air defense network in Mexico and along the U.S. southern border. However, Mexican constitutional obstacles to Mexico's inclusion in NORAD will not be overcome. So U.S. engagement planners should acknowledge these constitutional limitations and plan a stronger collective air defense within those limitations. Failing to do so will inevitably lead to non-attainable engagement activities. Security cooperation's greatest strength is its ability to bring nations together for planning and building relationships before an event takes place. Planning efforts should be integrated among the U.S., Canada and Mexico. The planning dialogue often opens access to formerly inaccessible decision-makers; it affords the opportunity to overcome historical mistrust back by building new trust through open cooperation to gain a mutual benefit.

Although a multitude of political, military, and economic issues complicate matters in North America, securing our borders from air attacks from the north and south remains an important pillar of an air defense strategy that transcends geographic borders for protection. Stopping the threat as far from the borders as possible is key. Only by leveraging hard and soft military power at all levels can we build an effective North American Cooperative Air Defense Network.

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